

ROAD BOWLING

FIRST WINNER | Brendan O'Donovan won the 1958 junior county championship

O'Donovan set the ball rolling with his county junior victory

THE suspension of bowling activities gives the opportunity to take a glance at one of the sport's most enduring competitions. It's one that delivers, year on year, memorable encounters and finalists whose names live long in the memory.

At the outset it was just junior but it's now distinguished as the junior A championship with a standing as the most prestigious of competitions for those emerging from regional ranks.

From Brendan O'Donovan to Billy McAuliffe, 62 champions fill the role of honour in an unbroken sequence, and the sense of expectation never fades as regional champions come forward to contest county rounds.

Over the next few weeks, we hope to give a brief overview of this annual showpiece from its beginning in 1958 up to the present time. We will cover its introduction to the All-Ireland series, give a breakdown of regional winners and recall some of the great scores that have made the championship so special.

The *Southern Star* archives, Gretta Cormican's extensive research and the writings of bowling's historians are the sources of information for events from decades past.

Ból Chumann was a fledgling Association when it held its third

convention at Bandon in December 1957, but it was finding its feet with over 50 delegates from various bowling strongholds attending. Significantly, a prominent contributor was one of the game's great advocates of the time, its first patron, Fr Michael O'Driscoll C.C. Cloughdun. His name would continue to be distinctively linked with the Junior A championship.

Hailing from Derryclough, Drinagh and an uncle of current treasurer James, Fr Michael described bowl-playing as one of the best sports in any code and was influential in the ground-breaking decision made later in the Convention which was to introduce a county championship for junior bowl-players, describing it as 'a considerable step forward towards the ultimate development of the game.'

Chairman Flor Crowley announced it as a 'really big innovation.' Prophetic words, indeed.

The senior championship, the only one in vogue at the time, was confined to the game's elite and the upsurge in interest demanded a new competition which would serve as a stepping-stone to the top level. Divisional boards were set up at that convention, the forerunner of today's regions, and it was those

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boards comprised of clubs from different locations who would run the new championship.

Basically, divided into four divisions covering the entire county, the new committees quickly set about organising the 1958 junior championship and scores were underway from January onwards. Brendan O'Donovan of Courtmacsherry and Finbarr Casey of Fairhill won through to the county final at Enniskeane.

O'Donovan had been out of the game for close on ten years but returned in style to capture the first junior county. In the semi-final he defeated Jack Fenton at Tinker's Cross while Casey's great run included a semi-final win at Crookstown over Ted McCarthy.

The opening lines of Flor Crowley's report summed up a disappointing 1958 junior final. It read: 'Last Sunday's score at Enniskeane was a victory for accuracy and judgement over superior power. O'Donovan had the accuracy and judgement, Casey had the power plenty of it but power that was entirely divorced from anything like reasonable accuracy and reasonable judgement.'

1959 saw the emergence of Fachtina O'Donovan of The Miles, Clonakilty. Fachtina, a Limerick-based Garda, is one of the all-time greats of junior bowling, one of only three to win the county twice and the grade's first All-Ireland winner. He had lost out to Brendan O'Donovan in the early rounds in '58 but went all the way in '59, defeating Bill Buckley in the final played also at Enniskeane.

In 1960 it was the turn of North Cork to provide the junior A champion, when Senan Horgan of Cloghroe defeated the great Cobh exponent Dick Barry at The Miles. Described as a classy and stylish player, Senan was the toast of his division after his county victory. East Cork was, at that time, a hot-bed of top junior bowlers and another of their coterie of fine players



Brendan O'Donovan, Courtmacsherry, was the winner of the first county junior A final, which was played at Enniskeane in 1958.

came through to contest the 1961 junior final. Jim Geasley of Cobh and Teddy O'Sullivan, Caheragh, had a rare battle at Enniskeane and it was the East Cork champion who won out and would later claim the intermediate crown as well, that new grade having been added in 1962.

Larry Duggan was a great player from the City division and he claimed the 1962 junior championship when getting the better of another fine West Cork champion, Marshall Clarke, the fondly remembered left-hander from Dunmanway. Their final was played at Ballincollig. Mid Cork produced a great champion in 1963 when John O'Driscoll, Ahiohill, went all the way to outright honours defeating City's Tom Dunphy at Millstreet.

The Miles were again hosts for the 1964 final and here, the City division had the champion again when Sean Murphy, Passage, won from West Cork's John Young of Drinagh, then also a top performer in junior bowling.

East Cork came good again in 1965 when Willie Dennis of Cobh got the better of yet another West Cork champion, John



Fr Michael O'Driscoll, Ból Chumann's first patron, whose association with the junior A championship is commemorated annually with the presentation of a Perpetual Cup in his honour.

O'Brien, Corran, Leap. This one was played at Templemartin.

Eight years in, the success of the championship was reflected with its inclusion in the All-Ireland series which, with the co-operation of Association's north and south, had been set up in 1963. Fachtina O'Donovan regained the Cork junior with a stirring victory over Tommy Ellis (Mid Cork) at The Miles. In coming from 50 metres be-

hind for the last to win with a supreme final effort, O'Donovan, who was representing the newly-formed Limerick region where he now resided, claimed his second junior county.

Flor Crowley described it as 'one of the best championship finals of the season so far and indeed one of the best of any season.'

The junior championship had also been set up in Armagh and it was Sean Cullen who was the inaugural winner there. O'Donovan and Cullen then met in the grade's first All-Ireland final. Brian Toal describes it: 'The first ever All-Ireland junior title was the honour beckoning Limerick's Fachtina O'Donovan and Armagh's Sean Cullen, at Grenagh, ten miles from Cork on Saturday August 27, 1966. And that special honour went to the fast, forceful and confident O'Donovan who won by a two-shot margin over Cullen, who, on the day, lacked sufficient speed to narrow the contest.'

The junior championship had reached its first milestone.

Don't miss next week's Star as we look at how the junior A progressed from 1967 on.

Ból Chumann na hÉireann

Bowling remains in lockdown until current restrictions ease